

Message Text

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12

ACTION EA-06

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CINCPAC

S E C R E T SINGAPORE 5520

LIMDIS

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, TH, SN

SUBJECT: SINGAPORE-THAILAND RELATIONS

1. DURING CALL ADMIRAL WEISNER AND I PAID ON DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND DEFENCE MINISTER GOH KENG SWEE DECEMBER 7, DR. GOH SPOKE CANDIDLY ON SINGAPORE ASSESSMENT OF SITUATION IN THAILAND INCLUDING REACTION HERE TO RECENT VISIT BY THAI PRIME MINISTER THANIN.

2. DR. GOH SAID SINGAPOREANS WERE "NOT UNHAPPY" ABOUT CHANGE OF GOVERNMENT IN THAILAND. PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT, WHILE DEMOCRATIC, HAD BEEN UNABLE TO GOVERN AND PRESENT REGIME BROUGHT AT LEAST SOME HOPE THAT THIS SITUATION COULD BE CHANGED. GOVERNMENTAL CHANGE HAD NOT BEEN RESULT OF COUP BY THE RIGHT-WING MILITARY, BUT INSTEAD COULD BE CALLED A "COUP BY THE KING" WHO HAD PERSONALLY PICKED THANIN AND OTHER LEADING MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENTAL STRUCTURE. THANIN APPEARED TO BE WORKING CLOSELY WITH GENERAL KRIANGSAK, THUS INDICATING THANIN ENJOYED MILITARY BACKING. HOWEVER, GOVERNMENT WAS NOT DOMINATED BY THE MILITARY BUT WAS COMPOSED PREDOMINANTLY OF CIVILIANS.

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3. THANIN ALSO UNDERSTOOD THAT "THIS WAS IT," AND THAT NEW GOVERNMENT HAD TO MAKE ITSELF FUNCTION. ON THIS SCORE, DR. GOH SUGGESTED THAT U.S. WITHDRAWAL FROM VIETNAM IN APRIL 1975 COULD TURN OUT TO BE A GOOD THING FOR THAILAND, SINCE THE THAI NOW KNEW THEY HAD TO RELY ON THEIR OWN EFFORTS AND COULD NOT DEPEND ON UNCLE SAM. NEW GOVERNMENT THEREFORE CARRIED WITH IT SOME HOPE OF BEING ABLE TO DEAL WITH BOTH ECONOMIC PROBLEMS AND THE INSURGENCY WITH SOME DEGREE OF EFFECTIVENESS.

4. NEVERTHELESS, SINGAPOREANS STILL HAD THEIR WORRIES ABOUT THANIN. IN THE FIRST PLACE, BY BACKGROUND HE WAS A JUDGE AND LACKED THE POLITICAL EXPERIENCE NECESSARY TO RUN A GOVERNMENT. IN ADDITION, HE SHOWED SIGNS OF PICKING MEMBERS OF HIS GOVERNMENT MORE ON THE BASIS OF THEIR LOYALTY TO HIM RATHER THAN ON THEIR EFFECTIVENESS AS ADMINISTRATORS. SINGAPOREANS ALSO LOOKED UPON THE THAI BUREAUCRACY AS OLD FASHIONED AND INEFFECTUAL (AND IN FACT THEY HAD TOLD THANIN DURING HIS VISIT HERE THAT IT WOULD BE BETTER TO HAVE A SMALLER-SIZE BUREAUCRACY THAT WAS CAPABLE OF FUNCTIONING THAN TO TRY TO WORK THROUGH THE PRESENT ESTABLISHMENT).

5. IT APPEARED FROM THIS CONVERSATION AND SUBSEQUENT LUNCHEON CONVERSATION AT THE RESIDENCE THAT THE NEW THAI GOVERNMENT HAS ASKED FOR AND IS RECEIVING HELP FROM SINGAPORE. DR. GOH INDICATED THAT HE HAD VISITED THAILAND TWO WEEKS AGO AND HAD MET WITH PM THANIN AND SENIOR MILITARY OFFICIALS. ALTHOUGH HE DID NOT SAY SO IN SO MANY WORDS, HE CONVEYED IMPRESSION THAT THANIN'S VISIT TO SINGAPORE WAS RESULT OF HIS OWN TRIP TO BANGKOK. WHETHER DURING THIS EARLIER TRIP OR IN COURSE OF THANIN'S VISIT HERE, THE THAI HAD ASKED FOR ASSISTANCE IN LOW-COST HOUSING DEVELOPMENT (IN RESPONSE TO WHICH SINGAPOREANS HAD RECOMMENDED AGAINST SINGAPORE-STYLE HIGH RISES SINCE THAILAND DID NOT LABOR UNDER SINGAPORE'S TERRITORIAL RESTRICTIONS) AND ALSO ASSISTANCE IN INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT. SUCH AID COULD AND WOULD BE GIVEN.

6. MORE IMPORTANTLY, THOUGH, THANIN HAD ASKED FOR SINGAPORE ASSISTANCE IN REORGANIZING THE THAI SPECIAL BRANCH SO AS TO BE BETTER ABLE TO COPE WITH COMMUNIST SUBVERSION. IN FACT, AS A RESULT OF HIS REQUEST A 7-MAN THAI TEAM WAS DUE

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TO ARRIVE IN SINGAPORE DECEMBER 7 TO STUDY THE ORGANIZATION AND TECHNIQUES OF THE SINGAPORE SPECIAL BRANCH. DR. GOH HOPED THAT SOME GOOD WOULD COME OUT OF THIS VISIT, BUT WAS NOT SURE: AS FAR BACK AS THE EARLY '70S THE THAI HAD SPOKEN ABOUT ASKING FOR SINGAPORE'S ASSISTANCE IN REORGANIZING THEIR COUNTER-SUBVERSION ACTIVITIES, AND YET NOTHING HAD EVER COME OF IT. DR. GOH REMARKED THAT THERE ARE PRESENTLY THREE OR EVEN FOUR INTELLIGENCE SERVICES IN THAILAND, NONE OF WHICH WERE PARTI-

CULARLY GOOD IN DEALING WITH COMMUNIST SUBVERSION. WHAT WAS NECESSARY, HE SAID, WAS SINGLE ORGANIZATION RESPONSIVE TO BOTH THE POLITICAL AND MILITARY AUTHORITIES, WHICH COULD FOLLOW VIGOROUSLY WHATEVER LEADS DEVELOPED FROM START TO FINISH, AS WAS THE PRACTICE IN SINGAPORE. HE HOPED THAT THE U.S. MIGHT FIND A WAY TO HELP CONVINCE THE THAI OF THE NEED FOR A SINGLE INTELLIGENCE SERVICE FOR COUNTERING THE INSURGENCY IN THAILAND, ALTHOUGH OTHER SERVICES COULD CONTINUE TO DEAL WITH MATTERS NOT CONCERNED WITH SUBVERSION. DR. GOH MENTIONED THAT SINGAPORE SPECIAL BRANCH HAD COMPILED EXTENSIVE DOSSIERS ON SUSPECTED SUBVERSIVES BEGINNING AS EARLY AS THEIR TERMS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS, WHICH WERE OF GREAT ASSISTANCE IN CAUSING SUSPECTS TO BREAK DOWN UNDER INTERROGATION AND REVEAL MORE DETAILS OF THEIR ACTIVITIES.

7. ANOTHER POINT WHICH DR. GOH SAID HAD BEEN MADE TO PM THANIN PERSONALLY WAS NOT TO CARRY OUT WHOLESALE ARRESTS OF SUSPECTED SUBVERSIVES. ONCE AN INDIVIDUAL WAS ARRESTED, HIS WHOLE FAMILY AND CIRCLE OF FRIENDS WOULD BE TURNED AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT, IN THE CASE OF FALSE ARREST, THE SITUATION WOULD BE EVEN WORSE. SINGAPORE FAVORED A MORE JUDICIOUS PRACTICE, FOCUSING ON THE KEY LEADERS RATHER THAN THE MORE EXPENDABLE FOLLOWERS.

8. DR. GOH LET IT BE KNOWN THAT A GOOD DEAL OF INTRA-ASEAN COOPERATION ON INTELLIGENCE MATTERS WAS TAKING PLACE, AND THAT THIS HAD BEEN GOING ON FOR SOME TIME. HE INDICATED THIS COOPERATION WAS ON A MULTILATERAL AS WELL AS BILATERAL BASIS.

HOLDRIDGE

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